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ABSTRACT

The collocation of services in regional Western Australia (WA) is an important strand of WA's regional development policy. The initiative is intended to foster working relationships among stakeholder groups with a view toward ensuring that regional WA communities have access to quality services. Clustering compatible services in smaller communities, such as Peel, offers the potential of adding value to existing services and helping to ensure that those communities survive and, hopefully, thrive in the future. As has been demonstrated in other Australian small towns and in Nebraska, the following features are critical to communities' success in improving educational outcomes: desire to preserve a valued lifestyle; desire to participate in particular kinds of work; willingness to invest time and income in reinventing and redirecting processes within the community; and determination to influence the community's joint destiny. The Australian Qualifications Framework has facilitated development of "mix and match" arrangements that have been established by Peel's vocational education and training and technical and further education (TAFE) sectors. The Peel initiative is to be administered by the Peel Education and TAFE Board, which is emphasizing joint education and training policy development and identification of desirable education and training pathways for students from each sector. (Contains 15 references.) (MN)

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# Collocation in regional development – the Peel Education and TAFE response

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## Collocation policy in regional Western Australia

The development of collocation of services in regional Western Australia (WA) is an important strand of WA's Regional Development Policy. The intention of this initiative is to foster working relationships amongst stakeholder groups, with a view to ensuring regional WA communities have access to quality services. The benefits attributed to successful collocation, from a state perspective, are a potential to:

- increase the number and quality of services delivered in regional communities;
- reduce capital and operational costs at a local, state and national level; and
- foster superior services in some of the smaller communities.

By clustering compatible services in smaller communities such as Peel, there is the potential to add value to the existing services and help ensure the survival and hopefully 'thrival' (Ellyard 1998) of that community into the future. As the Deputy Premier[1] explained in 1999:

> The promotion of regional areas as desirable places to live, work and invest is extremely important and so too is the provision of the necessary resources to enable regional communities to determine their own destiny more effectively. (Cowan 1999)

The state government Collocation Initiative encourages government agencies, service providers and regional communities to look at opportunities to share resources such as accommodation, infrastructure, utilities and staff in the delivery of related services.

Some small communities experience a tension between local desires for lifestyle, smallness, community connectedness and global economic imperatives which seem to drive them to become parts of larger units and to respond to external economic influences.

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As Ellyard (1998) warns:

> By the year 2020, a new paradigm will operate. 'Planetism' will shape job categories, products and services, and work organisations of the first quarter of the 21st century.

A helpful recent example of rural communities redirecting and refocusing their energies and commitment is in Nebraska, USA. Former and current primary producers (Australian Broadcasting Commission 2000) are proving that small



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communities can cooperate and commit to reinventing themselves and creating an upswing in their economy. Nebraska's income was derived from corn production virtually since the mid-west of the United States was settled. The local and state economy had been suffering from rural downturn for a decade. Nebraska's young people had been migrating to larger centres and the health of the community was declining in step with the added pressures. This was impacting negatively on what had been a desirable lifestyle the community wanted their young to have the advantages of. Economic threats brought on by the impact of commodity prices in global markets suggested that the prognosis for corn production remained poor. Through a range of community managed and designed local 're-education' initiatives, the state of Nebraska has been able to redirect its economy and start to grow a diversity of new work opportunities to provide opportunities for the local young people to remain in these small communities. As well, they have established numbers of initiatives for investing in their own futures.

## Education, training and the community

As was demonstrated in Nebraska, and has been evident in Australian small towns, a significant component of a community's health and well being is measured through the priority ascribed to education. Doughney (2000) explains that this is because education is not simply one of many community services but one of the most significant conduits to other important public and private goods such as employment, culture, values and personal autonomy (Hyland 1999). It is therefore in a regional WA community's best interests to have building or enhancing access to quality educational services as a primary goal. Cost savings measures may be a positive secondary outcome of service amalgamations, however if this aspect is treated as a primary motive, then a community may retrieve a short-term difficulty but without implementing any features for building community improvement. As Ellyard (1998) points out:

> Education planners will need to understand more deeply the nature of this world, the values and skills which will be needed for 'thrival' in this world.

Some of the critical features of success for a community working towards improved education outcomes are likely to include their:

- desire to preserve a valued lifestyle,
- desire to participate in particular kinds of work,
- willingness to invest time and income in the reinvention and redirection processes within their community, and finally
- determination to influence, or hopefully control, the community's joint destiny.

The Commonwealth Minister for Education, Dr Kemp (2000), voiced another important need catering for the employment future of our young people in regional locations:

> Ninety percent (90%) of today's teenagers will at some stage in their lives participate in post secondary education whether this is higher education or vocational education and training or both.

Numbers of experiments in collocation and/or services amalgamation in the education and training sectors have occurred in Australia during the last decade. These have met with varying degrees of success. Some examples have included initiatives in Nambour and Coffs Harbour, at the Victorian University of Technology and on the Rockingham Regional Campus of Challenger TAFE. Balancing the interests and needs of the participating sectors often emerges as a challenging factor.

Based partially on its previous experience, Challenger TAFE, along with two education partners - the WA Department of Education and Murdoch University - and the community, is producing a new concept in joint campus delivery of education and training in Peel. The concept goes beyond existing Australian models of education and vocational education and training (VET) campus collocation and incorporates the policy directions of a range of decisions at both Commonwealth and state levels.

The benefit of the Peel approach is that the consultation and deliberation processes undertaken for policy development at Commonwealth and state levels have been incorporated into the planning process at Peel. Initiatives developed for the new campus already sit within the scope (and possibility) of agreed national and state frameworks of agreement.

## Commonwealth education and VET policy responses

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) (Australian National Training Authority 1998) provided an opportunity for competency-based VET to be recognised in a variety of learning contexts - schools, public and private training provider organisations, and universities. One of the advantages of the AQF is that it allows for the 'translation' of courses into levels so that school, public and private VET providers and universities have a common language that they can apply to design and manipulation of curriculum and courses.

While the Framework documented levels of competence, the Council of State Ministers of Education (MYCEETYA) formalised some of the necessary processes for applying the AQF to curriculum. In July 1996, the incorporation of vocational education into the schools sector was endorsed and, hence forward, operated in a similar way to VET delivery in other sectors (MCEETYA 1996). Endorsement of particular training products and levels for VET in schools has had to be formally endorsed at a national level, as is the case with other VET providers. This consistent arrangement for each sector has still allowed proactive VET providers in schools to cater to a range of student demands with vocational education and traineeship arrangements.

Challenger TAFE has had a rich experience as training provider and/or auspicing agency to a number of high schools in the south-west metropolitan region, particularly in cooperation with the Excellence in Education Compact schools in the Rockingham, Kwinana, Warnbro and Hamilton Hill areas. These inter-sectoral arrangements have allowed for a rich mix of training products to be delivered to school students. Notably, some trainees have completed their schooling with a VET qualification as well as a tertiary entrance score, keeping their options open for post-secondary education choices.

As well, cooperative curriculum arrangements on the Rockingham Regional Campus of Challenger TAFE and Murdoch University has provided opportunities for TAFE students to progress to degree studies after either their first or second years of TAFE studies. Students can choose to seek a VET qualification and then pursue university studies or can shift to tertiary studies if they have decided their pathway lies in the direction of a university qualification.

## State education and VET policy response

These 'mix and match' arrangements have been extended at Peel so that students at Mandurah Senior College, a composite of the upper schools from three local high schools, will have university subjects as an option in their secondary education studies. This arrangement will be enabled by a policy decision currently being considered by the State Curriculum Council to formalise arrangements where secondary school students can incorporate tertiary content within their year 12 studies.

The Peel Campus will have the capacity to provide a mix of studies in secondary, post-secondary and tertiary areas. All secondary students from Mandurah will complete their education at the Peel Education and TAFE Campus. To enhance the development of flexible pathway arrangements amongst the three sectors, an Education Development Unit with a Pathways Officer is being established (Challenger TAFE 2000). This will address the need voiced by David Kemp that students at 'some stage in their lives participate in post secondary education whether this is higher education or vocational education and training or both'.

## The shape of things to come

> Ideological control preserves the core while operational autonomy stimulates progress. (Collins and Porras 1995)
>
> The forms change but the mission remains clear. Structures emerge, but only as temporary solutions that facilitate rather than interfere. (Wheatley 2000)

The model has been developed as a consequence of factors embedded in local circumstances and a history of trust and cooperative activity amongst the member institutions. It is not intended as a blueprint for other locations, because circumstances vary and features of this model may not be readily replicable.

### A cautionary tale

> While closer interaction between the university and VET sectors should be encouraged, this should not be perceived as being best achieved through proliferation of multi-sector institutions or universities delivering 'associate degrees' in VET[2].

The administrative structure established at the Peel Education and TAFE Campus has taken account and addressed the issue of one partner dominating the developmental processes for the campus, by establishing a range of structures and decision-making processes.

**Capacity to influence**

In some Australian examples of services locating at one site, ownership of the decision-making processes has come under contest when there are groups with strong partisan interests. The model at Peel is conservative in its structure. The Peel Education and TAFE Board have ownership of decisions and the process is located within a tripartite committee. The committee comprises the Challenger TAFE Managing Director, the local District Director for the WA Education Department and the academic head of Rockingham and Peel Campuses of Murdoch University.

Input from the local community and the influence or input of other government agencies can occur at the next decision-making level via the Education Development Unit. The role of this unit is to develop curricula, programs and services for the students on campus in response to locally identified needs, and the advice of state development and other specialist agencies.

> Each structure has a unique identity, a clear boundary, yet it is merged with its environment. (Wheatley 2000)

The Peel Education and TAFE Board have representation from each member agency and it directs the work of the Education Development Unit that has a brief to maximise education, training and employment outcomes for the campus students. This will be achieved by developing industry and commercial partnerships that provide the required knowledge, training and on-the-job experiences for students to ensure they are well prepared for the industry they plan to enter. These stakeholder groups will be purpose-driven and will last for the duration of the task involved. For example, each education and training pathway that is developed for students will be guided by an expert steering group that comprises community and specialist membership.

A warning from the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) on developing a working balance for VET and university also applies to retaining the integrity of school education:

> In developing and implementing policies for a seamless system, regard has to be given to the distinctive characteristics of both VET and higher education. The distinctive outcomes each sector is providing to clients must be retained, not diminished. (Australian National Training Authority 1997)

At Peel, education and training pathways will incorporate two or more of the following options: school education, TAFE training, university studies and work experience. Other attendant services may also be developed. For example, particular kinds of cross-sector mentoring arrangements and ways of jointly developing and managing portfolio education and training are items high on the agenda of 'must do's'. As well, the Board is keen to establish an arrangement of guaranteed placements in courses on the same campus for students exiting Mandurah Senior College and wishing to undertake studies at either Challenger TAFE or Murdoch University. One feature yet to be fully understood is the extent to which students from the region are prepared to travel to gain the hands-on experience they may require for their future employment[3].

### Levels of trust

Some campus arrangements that have involved a number of education and training agency groups have found that lesser partners are overwhelmed by the interests of one dominant partner. At Peel, dispute resolution has been designed to operate from the bottom upwards. Should a difficulty be unresolved along the way, then the final decision rests with the three members of the Peel Education and TAFE Board. A similar model has operated successfully at Rockingham Regional Campus, just north of Mandurah where Challenger TAFE, Murdoch University and the Rockingham City Council operate a joint library facility.

### Additional funding commitments

Marketing of the Peel Education and TAFE Campus remains the responsibility of the member organisations. Joint venture activities and the financial arrangements for their marketing will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Similarly, any activities perceived by the Peel Education and TAFE Board to incorporate an element of risk will be addressed and underwritten on a case-by-case basis. Sources of shared recurrent funding for the collocation venture are derived solely from the recurrent funding provided to each of the three partners through their individual service level agreements.

Decisions on the management of the various aspects of the joint facility were based on track records of the member institutions. For example, TAFE was allocated responsibility for campus services based upon its prior experience and the infrastructure support available to it, and Murdoch University was given responsibility for communications services because of its superior expertise in this area.

The Peel Education and TAFE campus is in its infancy, having existed for only five months. Currently, emphasis is being placed on joint education and training policy development and the identification of desirable education and training pathways for students from each sector. There is a need for baseline data to be collected and collated on students', teachers', administrators' and parents' perceptions, preferences, desires and ambitions. This material can potentially be compared with state data and local demographic data already available in order to design best-fit outcomes for students. Currently, the Peel Education and TAFE Campus has set up high expectations in the local community; for example, 150 more students returned to school for year 11 and 12 at Mandurah Senior College than had been anticipated. This is signalling a high level of expectation in the watching community. The campus will need to quickly demonstrate superior outcomes for its students.

## Notes

1. Hon Hendy Cowan, MLA Deputy Premier, Minister for Regional Development. In Preface to draft Regional Development Policy, July 1999.

2. Association of TAFE Institutes in Victoria.

3. The willingness to travel is one of a number of features of student behaviour and expectations the campus is hoping to attract funding to investigate in 2001.

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